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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000555

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SPEAKER DIES AS PRESIDENT BLASTS OPPOSITION

REF: A. LILONGWE 00508 B. LILONGWE 00540

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The Speaker of Parliament passed away late on June 27, after suffering a heart attack on the house floor on June 23. This comes as the President, along with various community groups, is blaming the opposition parties for the Speaker's condition, as well as Parliament's delay in passing the budget. The President has announced a five-day period of national mourning for the Speaker. There is no indication when Parliament will reconvene to discuss next year's budget and possible impeachment motions. Further delay in passing the budget may put in jeopardy Malawi's hopes for an IMF agreement this quarter. End Summary.

SPEAKER DIES

[1](#)2. (U) Speaker of Parliament Rodwell Munyenembe passed away on June 27 around 11pm at a Johannesburg hospital. The Speaker had suffered a heart attack and major stroke last Thursday on the floor of Parliament, as MPs were debating Presidential and Vice-Presidential impeachment procedures. The Speaker will be flown back from South Africa on Thursday June 30, and will be buried on Saturday July 2. The Government has declared a 5-day period of national mourning.

PRESIDENT AND PUBLIC BLAME OPPOSITION

[1](#)3. (U) President Mutharika blamed the leadership of the opposition MCP and UDF parties for the Speaker's collapse, and has called for the resignation of opposition MCP leader John Tembo. In a nationally broadcast speech on June 24, the President lashed out at former president Muluzi and Tembo, saying that the opposition had "degraded Parliament." He angrily condemned the behavior of MPs, saying that "nowhere in the world do MPs shout insults at the Speaker."

[1](#)4. (U) The President concluded his speech with a stern warning to those who might foment political unrest. Referring to Banda-era security laws still on the books, he cautioned the opposition, "I have not exercised the powers conferred to me by the laws of Malawi to deal with lawlessness, but do not consider this a sign of weakness... I work by democracy, but if some elements in the society push me to use the powers conferred upon me, I will do so."

[1](#)5. (U) There has also been a public backlash against the opposition, with many community groups calling on MPs to focus on the budget and discard any impeachment motions. Students, traditional chiefs, clergy, donors, and local community groups have all come out in support of the President and called for Parliament to reconvene and address the budget. On Monday the 27th students marched in support of the president in both the South and North of the country, carrying signs against the opposition, while religious groups planned to march in Lilongwe today.

[1](#)6. (U) The United Nations Resident Coordinator released a statement on June 27 outlining the consequences should Parliament not reconvene over the next forty-eight hours to address the budget. The statement made front-page news in the local media, and outlined the IMF deadlines that Malawi needs to meet in order to sign an agreement this quarter. If Malawi does not pass a budget by "early July", the IMF meeting could be pushed back till next quarter. This would be a severe blow to the Malawian economy as a food crisis looms on the horizon.

COMMENT

[1](#)7. (U) The Speaker's passing is a great loss to Malawian politics. Munyenembe was an admired figure, and he commanded the respect of all sides in the tumultuous atmosphere of Malawi's National Assembly. Munyenembe had a

reputation for honesty and fairness, and was a badly needed force for moderation during this combative parliamentary session.

18. (SBU) In choosing to attack the opposition, President Mutharika missed an opportunity to unite the country after the Speaker's collapse. The president could have used that moment of crisis to his political advantage to pressure the opposition into passing the budget in the name of national unity. Instead, his sharp attack will likely harden the attitude of the opposition, making it even more difficult to pass the budget. Despite mounting public protests over the opposition's behavior, Mutharika's foes remain defiant. The occasion of the Speaker's funeral on July 2 may provide the opportunity for a show of unity, although leaders may not be in the mood for compromise.

19. (SBU) Post shares the same concerns that the UN Resident Coordinator voiced over a delay in passing the budget. With a public mourning period for the rest of the week, Parliament will not come back together until July 4 at the earliest. Further debate on the impeachment motion and continued wrangling over the budget are likely. The deadline to pass the budget in time for consideration by the IMF will be very tight indeed.

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